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HISTORY OF EDUCATION; WHAT IT STANDS FOR

ALL callings and professions must pass through similar experiences in transition from the early empirical stage to the scientific. Each must prove its claims to this advantage, and must establish its terminology by taking the words of common use and giving them the definite meaning necessary in scientific discussion and inquiry. Of all callings, doubtless that of education is beset with most difficulties of the kind noted, chiefly because more people are, in one way or another, related to it, and are educators in some sense as parents, as teachers, and as administrators of school affairs. Such terms as education, teaching, instruction, training, school-keeping, and school-teaching are used with such looseness that to the common mind they are practically synonymous. Those who represent education as a profession must patiently apply themselves to more careful definition, and to careful demonstration of the scientific basis of their profession. In this interest I shall undertake to indicate what seems to me to be the necessary characteristics of a history of education, and what it stands for in practical application.

If education is "teaching school" in the usual sense, then a history of education is a record of the various devices and methods used, and of subjects taught in the centuries past. It is as valuable, and no more so, as the study of the modes of warfare and arms used by Julius Caesar would be to the common soldier of our modern army, or as a history of the methods of building boats and navigating them a thousand years ago would be to the common sailor on one of our ocean steamships.

If, however, education is an integral element and agency in civilization, its history must be defined as one with the history of civilization itself.

Happily, it is not necessary to give a new definition of history. Since Hegel gave us his *Philosophy of History*, and Guizot his *History of Civilization*, and Stanley his *History of the Jewish Church*, and since all thought has consciously or unconsciously

adopted forms of evolution, no one thinks of history as a mere aggregation of noted events, striking because interesting, or as marking epochs of change in the destiny of nations. Briefly, history is a record of the progress of the races in civilization,—progress in improving social conditions and in utilizing the materials of nature for the betterment of human conditions. It assumes that races have life tending toward maturity and fruitage as naturally as the seed toward the plant, and as the child toward manhood.

The rise and decline of peoples, their conflicts and their contributions to the new life which they inherit, and which in its turn disappears in all except the imperishable elements of law, order, and truth which it leaves to its successors—all this is the business of the historian to trace and to record.

What then is education that there can be a history of it? For our present purpose we define it as the method by which peoples in the several stages of their development have prepared the coming generation for the life of the period in which they are to do their part. The civilization of a given period is embodied in the institutions which in general are the state, the church, and the family. These institutions are also the instruments of civilization, and therefore assume forms demanded by the unquenchable spirit within, or else dissolve to give place to new forms.

It is then the institution, one or more, and together or separate that educates, that makes the youth a man of the period by making him one with itself as well as for itself.

The institution, besides being the embodiment of the spirit of civilization in one form and degree or another, includes that which is limited to itself by reason of its temporal relations. Besides the permanent and universal, of which it is the depository of the past, it has its institutional characteristics of language, customs, habits, sentiments, and opinions. Its education consists in its processes of fixing in the minds of its children the ideals it represents by instructing them in the knowledge it possesses, by training them to its habits, customs and tastes, and by giving them the intellectual power necessary to meet the demands of

the future. Its negative influence in education is quite as potent in what it excludes, by depreciating and forbidding, as by what it exalts and honors.

Again, every people naturally passes through its stages or epochs of development from childhood, in which its institutions are paternal, to the democratic and reflective when the individual inquires, considers and decides for himself. In each of these, the system of education corresponds to the condition of the institution.

Another characteristic to be observed is that the school and the school system is both a product and instrument of the institution, differentiated in the more advanced stages of its development. The savage tribes educate their children as truly, and after the same method, as the father of the family educates his sons, by associating them with him in his occupation, by relating to them his experiences and the traditions of his family, and by training them to the customs, language, and ideas of the family.

As civilization advances acquisitions increase, relations grow more complex, minds pass from the imitative stage to the rational and introspective. These larger duties must now be assumed by the school which must select the materials of learning and provide skillful methods by which to advance its youth in the same number of years to the higher plane of understanding and responsible action.

As there is an ebb and flow in the tide of human history, —instances of arrested development in the life of peoples, — it is for the history of education to note this, to follow the current of advance, and to observe the contributions of permanent value that are gathered from age to age.

Preparatory to the study of the history of education, it is required that one be a student of history in its broadest meaning. He must not only have acquired facts of history, but still more, he must have understanding of the progress of civilization, and the habit of interpreting events in their relation to such progress.

Then, in the study of history of education he is ready to consider its problems, of which the following are important: In

what stage of their educating processes are a people found? Has their civilization differentiated the school as an institution? What is its influence? What phase of life in ideal and in activity of mind and body does it intensify? Is the system of education the product of the unconscious development of society wholly, or has society reflectively and rationally adopted methods that conform to their ideal?

Then in the estimate to be placed upon the historical contributions of a people, he will inquire what elements have been incorporated as material factors in the education of subsequent history; and what general law of education has been discovered, and incorporated in use, that is accepted as a permanent contribution to the experience of the race.

Referring to historical examples, the study of the history of Chinese education must note wherein the system serves the end for which it is organized and is, so far, good. It will also note wherein the system that serves the institution defeats the ends of civilization, and causes an arrested development, and therefore offers nothing of value to the world at large. On the other hand, the history of Greek education discovers the principles and the methods of a specialized system in complete harmony with a developing life, that extended through a greater range of culture than any other nation in the world's history, and has consequently contributed materials in theory and in principles of education that have become as much a part of modern culture as her philosophy.

The practical value of a rational study of the history of education prepares us to study the historical rank of modern systems. We may answer in general, why and in what sense a given system is good; what interest or view of life it represents and supports; whether it is broadly civilizing or narrowly institutional; whether it is developing under conscious rational guidance, or is only unconsciously instructive.

But coming directly home to our own American system, it is only after a broad survey of the whole field of history and its educating forces that we can with any confidence pass safe judgment upon our own education. Of the unsolved problems that

are pressing upon us we have yet to give final answer to such as these: In what interest is our system organized? Is it for the industries, for citizenship, or for the highest ideal of a Christian civilization, which serves all others, in that it comprehends them? What ideal of life does it foster? What duties and responsibilities does it inculcate? To what degree is our system of education rationally adapted to its purpose, or on the contrary, how far are we following traditional methods handed down, or following the latest voices that offer change from what is old?

If the state and church are two separate and distinct institutions, and the state assumes the responsibility of educating its youth, where is the place for the inculcation of morality, and what are the evidences that moral character can be established without the aid of that ideal of life which Christianity has given to the world?

The serious problems of our education are not those of mere detail and temporary device; not whether this should be taught, or that left out; but those which indicate the trend of our development. In our schools, higher and lower, is a low form of commercialism taking possession of our schools, and crowding out or dissipating that pure spirit of culture that marked the older institutions of our country? Is the spirit of trade making shopkeepers of our youth instead of men and women for homes and patriotic citizenship? These questions cannot be answered by the sentiment nor by the appearances of today. It is only by taking a broad sweep in historical vision of the present as the fruitage of the past that we can judge correctly, or wisely direct the development of our system of education. Who, then, should be students of the history of education? One may be a great teacher, with no knowledge of the history of education, as one may be a loyal and industrious citizen without a knowledge of his country's history. He may be an expert politician without it, but he cannot be a statesman. He may be a teacher, doing well his appointed work under supervision, or as one of a system, but he cannot be an educator. No measure of teaching ability can make one an educator. Men who have attained renown as teaching specialists have depreciated the history of education.

As well might the miner who has dug deeper than any other, and brought to the surface new and precious things, decry the study of geography or astronomy.

It seems evident then that whoever will become an intelligent educator, able to estimate the place and worth of his own teaching, and give wise direction to his own energies, or wisely direct the energies of others, must be a careful student of the history of education. For this reason, too, the history of education should take high rank in our university curricula. It should be made serviceable in establishing the high ideals of manhood, and should counteract the diverting influences of specializations that often lose sight of the great end of living while perfecting the means of it.

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